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## Psychosis or the ineffable space of modernism

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## Psychosis and the ineffable space of modernism

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Psychosis and the ineffable space of modernism

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## Abstract

This paper returns to Le Corbusier's account of ineffable space, a radiant space of pure energy, in order to develop the idea of spatial psychosis. In psychosis, the subject's conceptual or symbolic framework – what Lacan calls the master signifier – is foreclosed to the subject. It is not repressed and hence unconscious, it simply does not exist for the subject. This paper elaborates the theory of psychosis in psychoanalysis and argues that perspective constitutes such a master framework. It argues that the perspective frame, in which space is always already organised for the viewer, is foreclosed to Le Corbusier and in its absence he is left with a dynamic fluidity that elides the familiar spatial territories of inside/outside, near/far, ....

Ineffable space is not simply an other space type, but a break with the spatial discourse of architecture and the anticipated space of modernism. We usually regard space as a given (by definition we are in it), but the experience of Le Corbusier raises the spectre that our relation to space is contingent. The purpose of this paper is not to describe ineffable space (any description would be a falsification), but to trace the consequences for architecture and subjectivity of this contingency.

The psychotic is able to make great leaps precisely because s/he is unable to use the conceptual frameworks that bind most of us to our desire. Psychosis has the potential to become a critical strategy for negotiating landscape-like mega-machine projects which threaten the agency of their inhabitants.



**Psychosis and the ineffable space of modernism**

'Then a boundless depth opens up, effaces the walls, drives away contingent presences, *accomplishes the miracle of ineffable space.*'

Le Corbusier, *New World of Space* (1948) p.8 his italics

'This tells you to what extent one must avoid the illusion that language is modelled on a simple and direct apprehension of the real.'

Lacan, *The Psychoses* (1956-57) pp.117-8

**[Caption 01]**

**Introduction**

Now, I don't want to cure anyone, but if you ever wanted to contemplate an other relation to reality, you could do worse than look at psychosis. The invisibility of space and the psyche are two of the most salient features of reality. It is because they are invisible, that we are able to position ourselves in the world.<sup>1</sup>

This paper is about Le Corbusier's concept of ineffable space, which he first put forward in the introduction of his book *New World of Space* (1948)<sup>2</sup>. Ineffable space is a refusal of the perspective model for space, and its transparent image, which marks a break with subjectivity as we usually construct it. Ineffable space has the unique characteristic that it does not position the viewing subject before a view. Despite the fact that architecture is the spatial art, no one in architecture has questioned the invisibility of space, or put forward a space that wasn't. If space were not invisible, then nothing would have an appearance. When Giedion defines the three space conceptions - the Archaic, Classic, and Modern - that organise architectural and psychical history, he assumes they are all equally transparent to vision and motion. When Panofsky and Gombrich debate whether perspective is a symbolic form or the natural state of vision (they are both right, an example of Venturi's

<sup>1</sup> Architecture and psychoanalysis share this extraordinary feature: their central objects of study - space and the psyche respectively - are not whole and not there. Lacan said that architecture was organised around emptiness, but he might as well have been talking about his own discipline.

<sup>2</sup> Le Corbusier, *New World of Space* (Reynal & Hitchcock and the Institute for Contemporary Art; New York and Boston, 1948). Le Corbusier, first published this text as an article, '*L'Espace Indicible*', in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, January 1946, pp9-10. Its importance to him is evidenced by the fact that he republished it twice more, in *Modulor 1* (1950) and *Modulor 2* (1955). There is also reference in *Oeuvre Complète* volume 5 to a paper called '*L'Espace Indicible*' from 1957, that Christine Boyer suggests was never written.

both/and) they take the transparency of the spatial image for granted. In their seminal paper on transparency, Rowe and Slutzky suggest that transparency - in particular the phenomenal transparency in the work of Leger, Juan Gris, and Le Corbusier - is one of the hallmarks of modernism. I shall argue that space and the subject are bound to each other to constitute what we usually call reality; and I shall speculate about the possibility of unbinding them. The entanglements of space and subjectivity - in other words, the relation between how we symbolise our world and our selves - is the central interest of this paper. This paper is part of a larger project to define in spatial terms the clinical categories of psychosis, neurosis, and perversion.

## [Caption 02]

### **The ineffable - Le Corbusier**

First some quotes. 'Ineffable space' opens with a statement about our fundamental spatiality.

'Taking possession of space is the first gesture of living things, of men and of animals, of plants and of clouds,... The occupation of space is the first proof of existence.' [p7] Later: '...endowed with the sense of space, a faculty which psycho-technical methods seek to reveal.' '...an incessant desire to take possession of space...' p9

*Possession* - Space is in me; a kind of incorporation; a kind of desire.

*Occupation* - I am in space. Usually, it is a matter of position.

*Psycho-technical* -space is understood through a hybrid psychoanalytic/ material analysis, an analysis that has the precision of technology, a whiff of the pyro-technical.

Le Corbusier may be in this space, but it is easier to claim that this space is in him. If he is in it, he is in it without position.

Le Corbusier's ineffable space is a radiant space of pure explosive energy, derived from his traumatic first encounter with the Parthenon.

'Action Of The Work (architecture, statue, or picture) on its surroundings: vibrations, cries or shouts (such as originate from the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens), arrows darting away like rays, as if springing from an explosion; the near or distant site is shaken by them, touched, wounded, dominated or caressed.' [p8]

*Action of the work* - a dynamic relation to its surroundings.

*Vibrations cries shouts* - an enigmatic ventriloquism. Space is an organ, a mouth. Acoustic = energy. Imagine the mouth-space of

Samuel Beckett: whose words have a kinetic efficacy.  
*Arrows, darts, rays* - like god in Annunciations, like St. Teresa  
in ecstasy.  
*Touched, wounded, dominated, caressed* - something Oedipal.

### [Caption 03]

Readers of Le Corbusier will recognize the interjectorial style and idiosyncratic language that arcs back to his account of the Parthenon. He is picking up where *Towards an Architecture* (1923) left off. In 'Regulating lines' he wrote, '...rhythms apparent to the eye... resound in man by an organic inevitability.' [68] In 'Pure creation of the spirit', the chapter about the Parthenon, 'This sounding-board which vibrates in us is our criterion of harmony. This is indeed the axis on which man is organised in perfect accord with nature and probably with the universe,...' [192]. And 'If we are brought short by the Parthenon, it is because a chord inside us is struck...; the axis is touched.' [196]

Le Corbusier scholars have interpreted his preoccupation with ineffable space as an attempt to synthesize the arts, and ineffable space as the emergent property of such a synthesis. In *Le Corbusier and the continual revolution in architecture* (2000), Charles Jencks says that the paper on ineffable space 'shows how he was beginning to translate his... Ubu painting and sculpture into architecture.' and interprets the forms of Ronchamp and Sainte-Baume as metaphors for 'acoustic dishes, or parabolic reflectors, listening to each other' [261]

In *Le Corbusier: Homme de Lettres* (2011) M. Christine Boyer writes 'By the mid 1930's, Le Corbusier was well on his way toward a synthesis of the arts, expressed in his writings as a theory of "ineffable space" (*espace indicible*)' [p427] She points to a key paper he published in 1936 called '*Sainte Alliance des Arts majeurs ou le Grand Art en Gésine*' ('Holy Alliance of the major Arts or the Grand Art coming into Being'). This is Boyer quoting the paper and her comment:

"The work of art is a conscience which opens its door on something that is not in the house, but in its own landscape externalising itself in all directions outside of architecture, profound, to the faraway." In other words, the work of architecture, as a formal expression, always provides a lyrical escape.' [Sainte Alliance p91 quoted in Boyer p427]

*Homme de Lettres* ends with a section called 'Ineffable Space' as if ineffable space represented a kind of end point that was also a return to origins, a lyrical escape and return, the completion of a life that we all hope for. 'In one sweep of the hand, Le Corbusier reaches backward and forward, drawing a line of

continuity from his first Purist paintings to the sculptural garden on the roof of the *Unités...*, from the lessons of Athens to those of Paris.' [p684]<sup>3</sup>

These familiar themes of synthesis and continuity, this appeal to the lyric, belie an extraordinary detail –

‘Then a boundless depth opens up, effaces the walls, drives away contingent presences, *accomplishes the miracle of ineffable space*. [p8]

*A boundless depth* – it resists representation.

*Contingent presences* – the appearances of things; like you, the reader.

*The miracle* – the whiff of divine intervention.

We can ask what sort of space this is. I’d like to take Le Corbusier at his word, treat this statement literally (not phenomenally) because in matters of space, I am a realist. And here we come up against a problem.

#### [Caption 04]

#### **the ineffable – what it is not**

It is easier to understand what the ineffable is not, than what it is. Lets put it in relation to its other: depth bound by the vanishing point. A boundless depth would be a space unbounded by the vanishing point that terminates every view. Every enfilade, coulisse, railroad track, or Haussmannian boulevard appeals to this point, but it is implied by the view of anything, including landscape and field space, including the most nomadic mat-building flow-space by Archizoom.

Space not bound by the vanishing point would not calibrate distance, or at least not calibrate it by size, and not calibrate it from a viewer. Walls would no longer appear to converge as they recede from the viewer. Things may still look farther way – Le Corbusier has not eschewed depth, only depth bound – but they achieve that look without getting smaller. We can assume that in the absence of the vanishing point, other attributes of space are

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Charles Jencks, *Le Corbusier and the continual revolution in architecture* (Monacelli Press; New York, 2000). M. Christine Boyer, *Le Corbusier: Homme de Lettres* (Princeton Architectural Press; New York, 2011). Boyer’s book is an exhaustive source book for Le Corbusier’s letters and articles. She argues that Le Corbusier is trying to consolidate the figure of mathematician and the poet and the mathematical and poetic aspects of his work. The writings from the mid 1930’s leading up to *New World of Space* are marked by the frequent use of the words synthesis, alliance, and unite. Boyer also cites another key archival research project, Catherine de Smet, *Le Corbusier: un architecte et ses livres* [108].

absent as well. Objects would no longer occlude each other, for in order to overlap, they have to be seen from a point of view. Everything would be equally present, which implies a kind of instantaneity. Le Corbusier may be in this space, but it is more likely that it is in him. He is either, paradoxically, nowhere in this space, or else he is everywhere in it, distributed across its glittering surface, the way the dreamer is distributed across the surface of a dream. As hallucinogenic as this may seem, it is closer to reality, for walls do not really converge and objects do not really get smaller as they get farther away from us. Space is not really organised for the viewer or its desire, not for me not for you. And it really is full of energy and motion. If a boundless depth is less illusory than a bounded one, perspective seems to turn us toward and away from reality in a single gesture.<sup>4</sup>

#### [Caption 05]

#### Perspective

At this point we need to explain perspective. In Brook Taylor's diagram from *New Principles of Linear Perspective* (1719/1811), a man views an object; it could be an altar at the end of a nave. Perspective is a projective technique for producing images. It draws a geometric relation between three things: a viewer standing at an eye point, an expanding view, (what, in *Della Pittura* (1436), Alberti quaintly called the *pyramid of vision*), and a transparent picture plane upon which the image of the view is projected. The projective geometry links the viewer to its image of a view, and defines the transparency of the image. In the image so produced, the object appears smaller, the surfaces receding from the eye point appear to converge on the vanishing point. The vanishing point is always opposite the eye; at the point of intersection of the line of sight and the picture plane.

I stand in the nave – that Renaissance paradigm of space – viewing the altar and contemplating my proximity to salvation. We usually draw a perspective to construct a view to something we desire, and desire is a waiting game. The view has the *from me/here to you/there* semblance of a path that confers an implied temporality on space and desire, and that inscribes subjectivity into space the way it is inscribed in the subject-object form of language. Perspective allows us to share our views. You cannot have my images, but you can come to my position and see what I

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<sup>4</sup> Freud described psychosis as a turning away from reality. It seems that, in matters of space, our relation to reality is defined by the trop of turning and it matters little which sense it has. Cf. Sigmund Freud, 'Splitting of the ego in the process of defense' (1940/1938/1937), in *Sigmund Freud, On Metapsychology: the theory of psychoanalysis*. Angela Richards and James Strachey (eds.) (Penguin; London, 1991), p 463. This paper was unfinished at the time of his death. Psychosis is unfinished business.

see, or else I can snap a photo or sketch a picture and show you my view. We share views in the same sense that we share meanings, because there is a public language (of words, of pictures) for conveying it. In this sense, perspective is an agreement with others, and the objectivity of space is a kind of infinitely cross-checkable inter-subjectivity made possible by perspective. Perspective turns us away from reality but it does so in the service of something more important for consciousness; it allows us to construct a reality whose most significant aspect is that it is shared. Perspective space is no realer than ineffable space, it is simply more sharable. For all these reasons, we are signed up members of the perspective club, without which spatial discourse would be impossible. It has the compulsory force of language.

Ineffable space is an explosion into a new form of space and subjectivity. We momentarily glimpse freedom from a space that confines us to views and positions, all manner of gluey subjective entanglements. It is too simple to say it is an integration of the arts because that assumes that it is about art and not what Le Corbusier said it was about, which is space. I am less interested in *why* it was proposed, than in what it *does*. By placing the subject into a view, perspective seems to be the formula for normal space, or at least the normally neurotic space of subject positions. Space surrounds me in a cosy container so that I can imagine walking down the nave to what I desire, and then tell you about it. The ineffable is not about something added to make a better space (more energy); nor is it a simple displacement (a voyage to somewhere exotic, like Le Corbusier's voyage to the orient). It is more like the same space, from which something has been removed. But it is not like the simple removal of an altar from a nave, which leaves the nave and the viewer untouched. Something is unbound. Whatever it is that binds me to space, seems no longer to operate. Whatever it is that binds me to me, seems no longer to operate. The exotic voyage quickly becomes old hat, but this same space, threatens to never contain me.

[Caption 06]

### Psychosis

The only other place we encounter such a radical repositioning of our relation to reality is in psychosis. The central narrative in the psychoanalytic discourse of psychosis is the case of Daniel Paul Schreber a distinguished German lawyer whose crisis began when was appointed to the high court. It was exacerbated by being unable to have children. He was convinced he was the only remaining man in a world of depleted grey men. He was tormented by divine rays that effeminised his body and interrupted his thoughts, so that he could repopulate the world with god's children. His father was an disciplinarian whose correction



regime extended to body braces. The overriding image I have of *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness* (1903) is of a rain-lashed Schreber howling into the storm, closing windows, slamming shutters, drawing curtains, turning off lights. No number of architectural layers, succeeds in keeping God's rays out, and Schreber in. Psychosis - or at least the delusions associated with psychosis - are a particular form of architectural disorder. In this vignette, architecture fails to draw the line between inside and outside, to regulate the border crossing, to maintain the container.

Psychosis involves a disintegration of the self; and the highly structured delusions of the psychotic are an attempt to erect a defensive outside against this crumbling centre. Psychotics hear voices. They sometimes see things. They invent words. In the paper 'Neurosis and Psychosis' (1923), Freud writes:

'...neurosis is the result of a conflict between the ego and its id, whereas psychosis is the analogous outcome of a similar disturbance in the relations between the ego and the external world.' (p149) And then: 'In regard to the genesis of delusions, a fair number of analyses have taught us that the delusion is found applied like a patch over the place where originally a rent had appeared in the ego's relation to the external world.' (p151)<sup>5</sup>

The delusions of the psychotic are like a patch placed on a rent in the subject's relation to reality. The psychotic attempts to repair the world with a new one of their own making. It is a creative act. Lacan asks, what kind of relation between subject and world could Freud be referring to. His answer, a symbolic relation, the symbolic world.

'...you will see this from the context, it's to a deficiency, to a hole in the symbolic, that [Freud] is referring, even if in the German text it's the term reality that is used.' [p156]<sup>6</sup>

### **Master signifier — Foreclosure**

The symbolic order does not work for psychotics. They hover somewhere between an unmediated reality and fantasy: what Lacan calls the real and the imaginary. The symbolic order comprises the great symbolic or conceptual systems that frame human

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<sup>5</sup> Freud, 'Neurosis and Psychosis' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. James Strachey (ed.) (The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis; London, 1924 (1923)), pp. 147-53. Henceforth *The Standard Edition*.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses 1955-1956* (Norton; NYC, 1993). All page numbers in Lacan refer to *The Psychosis*, unless otherwise noted.

relations and make them possible: language, religion, money, what the sociologist Durkheim called social facts. It should be clear by now that space - with its capacity to codify visibility in terms of desire, place, subject-positions, and other functions of subjectivity - has to be understood as one such. In Lacan's text, the master signifier is the lynchpin of the symbolic order, and it is the foreclosure of this signifier to the subject that is the structural deficit of psychosis. Foreclosure is Lacan's translation of Freud's *verwerfung* (disavowal, repudiation in the *SE*), 'the mechanism,... by means of which the ego detaches itself from the external world.' [p153] It is not repressed and hence unconscious, it simply does not exist for the subject. The foreclosure or loss of this signifier leaves a hole in the symbolic order for the subject. 'Psychosis consists of a hole, a lack, at the level of the signifier.' [p201]

The master signifier is an uber-signifier that binds the subject to its own discourse. It marks a position that orients each of us in the field of the Other. [pp223,224] In *The Psychoses* (1957/1993), Lacan builds the concept by condensing several terms, including the-name-of-the-father (*le-nom-du-père*), the law, 'the law of the signifier' [P223], the paternal metaphor, the primordial signifier instituted by myth 'aimed at installing man... in the world' [P200], Freud's dead father that ties us to the law [E464-65]. He calls this operation metaphor. Lacan links it to Freud's account of the Oedipal complex according to which the child emerges from the Oedipal complex by assuming the name of the father, in other words, by internalising the capacity to act with his authority and desire. The name is important because it indicates the symbolic aspect of this authority, on a par with the *Ten Commandments* or when the police say, *I arrest you in the name of the law*. Symbolic as opposed to real authority, like a gun, or imaginary authority, a threat.<sup>7</sup>

Lacan may have developed his thinking on the master signifier by a close reading of Freud's Oedipal complex (to speak with the authority and desire of the father), but its reach extends to the

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<sup>7</sup> There seems to be no basis in linguistics and semiology for a hierarchy of signifiers such that we could distinguish master signifiers; Emile Benveniste does not mention them in *Problems in General Linguistics*. In Saussure, signs are in differential relations to each other; each sign is simply different from each other one. It may be a semantic effect. Lacan calls the master signifier a paternal metaphor, and metaphors are usually understood to be a function of meaning. This has an intuitive logic: certain words rally discourses around them, organise our speech, condense meaning, and begin to function within a limited territory as masters: *freedom* in American political discourse, *sustainability* is the discourse of development. Everyone seems to own them, and they become drained of content even as they condense it. The efficacy of these words is in inverse proportion to their truth (the worst polluters are now sustainable; BP, the master of non-renewable resources, runs 'green' adverts).



subject's efficacy in language, language which is both the source of its power and the limits of it. To my mind, the most important aspect of the master signifier has to do with agency. This is a structural as opposed to semantic function. The master signifier yokes me to my voice the way the perspective apparatus yokes me to my images. It makes my speech mine. Foreclosure involves a catastrophic loss of agency. I lose my voice and hence my power. The effect of psychotic delusion is to re-construct what should have been an internalised agency, in the world. We have glimpsed Schreber's disrupted relation to authority, paternal, legal, and religious. Typically the psychotic hears voices, and attributes it to others or to the environment. Lacan quips that everyone hears their own voice, its just that the psychotic cannot tell that it is theirs. The psychotic does not attribute their voice to themselves, not because they mistaken it for someone else's, or don't hear very well, but because the relation that binds the subject to its own voice does not exist.<sup>8</sup>

**Perspective - master signifier**

I just said the master signifier yokes us to our voice the way the vanishing point and picture plane yokes us to space. The perspective frame organises our visual experience so that we can be effective spatial agents. Although to my mind, the perspective frame is the most coherent model for the master signifier, Lacan did not make this claim.<sup>9</sup> I want to argue that the perspective frame functions as the master signifier for space because I want to argue that ineffable space shares with psychosis the structural deficit of foreclosure. The perspective frame, in which space is always already organised for the viewer, is foreclosed to the inhabitant of ineffable space, and in its absence s/he is left with a dynamic fluidity that elides the

<sup>8</sup> The authority with which I speak, is not about mastering a subject matter, but about mastering my voice. This mastery is not only an effect of symbolic attachment, but also of position. According to Lacan, the master signifier positions me in the field of the other. My authority to speak cannot be disengaged from the position I hold vis-à-vis others, who grant that authority by agreeing to listen. I stand before you, this man, speaking, and we cannot dissociate the man from the speech. I speak in my name because it was the name I took up and internalised from my masters, and I convey to you something of my own agency and power, which cannot be disentangled from you. This agency and power is collectively held.

<sup>9</sup> When Lacan developed the idea of the master signifier in the 1950's, he does not mention perspective, even though perspective seems to be the best model for the master signifier. He explains it with similes like the highway that 'bundles' local roads. Perspective structures our views, and thereby allows us to be effective spatial agents, but it has no claim on the content of those views. Although most discussions of the master signifier dwell on the semantic, to my mind (I am a formalist), the structural function of the master signifier is more important.

familiar spatial territories of the view, of inside/outside, near/far, fore- mid- and background... This is an appeal, not to reason, nor to evidence, but to the understanding.

What conception of space and fluidity is at work here? Space is the field of images (all possible images of all possible viewers). We don't usually think of space as a field of images, we think of it as space, but space - space itself - like the psyche, is a big fat nothing. If you want to know what space is, close your eyes and stick your tongue out the window. It is not a question of what space is really like, as if we could strip away the layers of paper and get back to bare walls - we are always already papered - but of how others represent space to us, by words images and buildings; and thereby put it into circulation.

The lesson of psychosis and foreclosure is that experience for the subject is not a simple matter of fact. We do not experience the world simply because we have a body with a sensory surface. It requires an attachment. We have to bind ourselves to our images. We do it with a universally shared conception of space called perspective. Perspective binds images to each other to create coherent spatial discourses, like well-formed plans, and integrated design projects; and it bind subjects to images to construct their spatial experience. It says that experience will take a certain form, and have a certain relation to the subject of experience. Experience will take the form of a flow of images of views, although it has no claim on the content of those views. Our images have to be joined up and they have to be significant for us. We have to be able to distinguish them from the rest of the world. We have to have an account of the image that approximates the signifier, the visual signifier.

Psychoanalysis is the study of how language flows through the subject. Freud defined this flow in his work on the free association of words in analysis, matched by the free floating attention of the analyst. He related it to the condensation and displacement of dream images. Words and images either replace each other or get sticky together.<sup>10</sup> They have a kind of natural affinity which goes on happening even when we are not paying attention. Lacan said time and again *the unconscious is structured like a language and the unconscious is the field of the other*. For Freud, we are a conduit for language; for Lacan, a signifier machine. We do not have the space to look at their work on language, but it goes right to the integrity of the subject, for this continuous flow constitutes the principle of continuity of the subject. Space is not a language, but we are here to sketch the idea that space is a flow of signifiers. We are intensely spatial. We take possession of space; we occupy it. So

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<sup>10</sup> One of our PhD students, Cameron McEwan, is working on the link between Aldo Rossi's concept of analogical thinking in *Architecture of the City*, and Freud's work on dreams.

wrote Le Corbusier. As in language, we are awash in space and space flows through us. Lacan coined the term *extimate* (= intimate + exterior) to denote this *in you more than you* relation.<sup>11</sup>

We can see how this works by reference to Taylor's diagram. As a model for vision (which it purports to be) as opposed to simply an instruction about how to make realistic pictures, perspective depends for its intelligibility upon a series of equivalences. In Taylor's tablet, the object is in three places at once: in the view, on the tablet, in the eye of the beholder. The image is in two: on the tablet and in the eye of the beholder. Note the raised hand. The image is out there in the world and in the eye. My images are in me, but only in the sense that they are attached to me symbolically. It is the same with language.<sup>12</sup>

#### [Caption 07]

To make a long story short, did you ever wonder what would happen if you took Taylor's tablet away? I think that's what has happened with ineffable space. What is at stake is nothing short of the intimacy and integrity of the I: the I who speaks and the I who sees (all puns intended). It seems easy to remove Taylor's image because it is drawn as if it were a tablet. But it is not clear what would be left. When we take the image out of the context of projection, the image loses its transparency and the subject loses its location, as the single point of reception of experience to which the I refers. Unlike building materials, the transparency of the image is not a material fact, because it is always a question of transparent for who. My image is transparent for me because it is a projection of my view on the picture plane. It might still be possible to speak of visual experience, but it is not clear in what sense that experience would be mine. If we return to ineffable space for a moment: Le Corbusier's cries and shouts are announced as if they were concrete facts. What could only be *percepts*, are detached from the *percipiens*.

<sup>11</sup> To say that space is the field of the other is to equate the spatial image with the signifier. To say that images function as signifiers is to attribute significance to images. Freud included words and images in this account of the unconscious. It is not to say that space is a language, which would be to claim that images are like words. Unlike words, images do not have definitions and are not organized in a grammar. For a discussion of the image as a visual signifier at least within the domain of cinema, cf. Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen*, Vol. 16, no. 2, 1975, pp. 14-76.

<sup>12</sup> In order to extricate himself from an impossibly figurative language, Lacan repositioned the architecture distinction inside/outside to the subjective one symbolic/real. Only in a figurative sense could you say desire is in us, because desire does not have the logic of position. The crumbling world of the psychotic is not interior, nor is the one he rebuilds a new exterior. Closing doors and windows does not work for Schreber. The psychotic's symbolic relation to his/her world is crumbling. S/he replaces it with a new reality, a new certainty.

Imagine having someone else's images. Or seeing this room from a position elsewhere than where you are.<sup>13</sup>

#### [Caption 08]

Imagine if all these signifiers which are not space but images of space and which are, at least in a naïve sense, in me, were drawn out of me. As if my spatial experience, which I represent to you as photographs, really were photographs for me too, blowing in the wind. I would have no control over them, even though they seemed to exhibit agency. I would begin to disperse, and my images would begin to harden, to thicken, to become real. To replace me in the world. This process of concretisation and exteriorisation of the image, of myself, others might notice it happening to me, but how could I notice it? Lacan has a way to understand this: '...whatever is refused in the symbolic order, in the sense of *Verwerfung*, reappears in the real.' [p13] When we contemplate the possibility of decoupling ourselves from space, we realise that space is not a stable pre-existing thing from which we are now cast adrift, but that the perspective couple had no small part in constituting both ourselves and our space. We are faced with the Kantian conundrum of *things-in-themselves*. Ineffable space is perfectly possible, possible in the sense of being conceivable, but if it were to obtain, the I would not be here to see it.<sup>14</sup>

#### [Caption 09]

#### Conclusion...

The aim of this psychoanalytic reflection on architecture has been to disengage the spatial image from space, and thereby to reclaim for space its symbolic and contingent status. Space for the subject is the flow of signifiers to which we are yoked by the perspective apparatus. Whatever is real about space – the remainder of emptiness and energy – is for better or worse beyond our experience, not because it is impossible, but because it makes the I impossible. Lets trace this conclusion several ways.

<sup>13</sup> When Caillois described a spatial form of psychical collapse, he reported patients who claimed to see the space they are in but could not locate themselves in it. Or who feel invaded by space, as if space failed to localise and individuate them. Cf. Roger Caillois, 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia' (1935), translated and reprinted *October* Vol. 31, 1984. Lacan intimated the possibility of the *percept* without a *percipiens* in 'On a Question Prior to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis (1958)', in *Ecrits: the first complete edition in English*. (W W Norton; New York, 2006), pp. 445–88.

<sup>14</sup> The neo-Kantian, Peter F. Strawson articulates a similar position in *Individuals: an essay in descriptive metaphysics* (Methuen/Doubleday Anchor; New York, 1959/1963).

**...radical break**

Ineffable space is not simply an other space type, but a break with the spatial discourse of architecture and the anticipated space of modernism. We usually regard space as a given (by definition we are in it), but the experience of Le Corbusier raises the spectre that our relation to space is contingent and symbolic. It could have been otherwise. It may be based on an optical reality that we share with non language-based life forms like dogs, but it is the significance of that reality for us that is at stake. This paper has not attempted to describe Le Corbusier's ineffable space (any description would be a falsification) or to trace its lineage (purist painting, the free plan, the radiant city, the radiant farm), but to trace the consequences for architecture and subjectivity of this contingent and symbolic relation.

**[Caption 10]**

Modernism has been defined by breaks and subsequent re-continuities that it has had to negotiate with its pasts. What is so radical about a boundless depth is not that it suggests an alternative image of space, a new style perhaps, but that it decouples spatial experience from the subject. Ineffable space marks a break with reality more absolute than any stylistic or ideological break based on new materials and technologies, conquests, and revolutions. I am aware of no others, although Beckett tarries in the same territory. More work needs to be done, perhaps a project that builds a typology of breaks. In present the case, it is clearly an unrealised break. It is hard to imagine such a break ever being more than a brief eruption, a glimpse. A break depends for its intelligibility upon the continuity of an attendant subject, and it is this continuity that is called into question. This is perhaps the aspiration - lets call it the modernist gesture - that defines modernism and gives it its hard edge. It will go on happening, because it can never succeed.

The paper sheds light on the observation that the 20<sup>th</sup> Century falls under the sign of psychosis (Georg Simmel, Al Alvarez, Rem Koolhaas, Deleuze+Guattari). These authors point, not simply to the violence of the 20<sup>th</sup> C, its oneiric extremism, its delusional politics, its problematic disengagements with the past, its over-valuation of the new, the rise of the machine which is a signifier for both psychosis and modernity,... but to an inner disintegration that seems part and parcel of the creative process of 20<sup>th</sup> Century thought and action. This paper has been able to make these general observations precise for architecture, by delineating the mechanism of this disintegration in foreclosure; in the particular case of Le Corbusier, the foreclosure of the perspective model for space and subjectivity, which may go some

way toward explaining the enduring relevance of Le Corbusier in contemporary thought.

**[Caption 11]**

This paper is an extension of my book, *Brunelleschi Lacan Le Corbusier*, which argued that Brunelleschi's invention of perspective and Le Corbusier's traumatic experience on the Acropolis mark the two poles of architectural spatial experience.<sup>15</sup> We can only mark a break with something, modernist or otherwise, if it has already been symbolised (that's why there are no revolutionary dogs). When Brunelleschi invented perspective, wittingly or no, he bound the viewer to a flow of images, to space, to a spatial agency. We can talk about the subject as something bound, tied, wrapped, sprung. He created the conditions for a future break, a future unbounding, and consequent explosive release of energy, and reordering of priorities and values. I do not claim that Le Corbusier was psychotic (although Rem Koolhaas did), but among all of the architectural inventions that were his legacy to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, one of them was to reject the bounds of perspective for a new form of concrete and exterior subjectivity, a trajectory, that can never be fully realized as space because it can never be fully realized as subjectivity.<sup>16</sup>

**...resistance**

I am ambivalent about psychosis. I have called it a creative act and a catastrophic loss of agency. The psychotic is for Deleuze+Guattari (a doubled author, a split authority), the great figure of creativity in the fluid world of 20<sup>th</sup> C capital. They dismiss the Oedipal complex as an absurdity of Victorian Viennese conservative family values, but they maintain the figure of the psychotic as the action hero and creative agent of capitalist society and the desiring machine as one of the key metaphors for subjectivity. For Deleuze+Guattari, the master signifier is a no-trespassing sign, that compartmentalises the world into discrete territories, and the foreclosure of the master signifier is a form of creative de-territorialisation, that shakes things up, allows new forms of thought and action.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lorens Holm, *Brunelleschi Lacan Le Corbusier: architecture space and the construction of subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Rem Koolhaas, 'Dali and Le Corbusier: the paranoid critical method', *Architectural Design*, Vol. 2-3, 1978. Also, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (The Monacelli Press; New York, 1978/1994), the chapter 'Europeans: Biuer! Dali and Le Corbusier conquer New York', pp235ff.

<sup>17</sup> A spatial shizo-analysis of Deleuze+Guattari has yet to be done. About the first and only architectural foray into this territory is Andrew Ballantyne, *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects* (Routledge; London, 2007).



1  
2  
3 A full-blown psychosis may be the best response to environments  
4 of total control where agency has been shifted not simply to  
5 others but to machines or to environments which, to us, are in  
6 effect machines, because we can only ever hope to be cogs in  
7 them. You relinquish authority to survive. This is a 20<sup>th</sup> century  
8 spectre. In architecture, Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter called it  
9 the city of total control. Lewis Mumford, that theorist of cities  
10 and technology called these environments - marked by an  
11 irresistible confluence of social, political, military, and  
12 ideological control - the mega-machine. Although this machine is  
13 of our own making, it operates with its own values and priorities  
14 that seem to reflect no one's, not even the leader impaled at its  
15 apex. When capitalism becomes a system with no alternative  
16 (Slavoj Zizek argues this point), it becomes a mega-machine. The  
17 mega-machine is perhaps most virulent when power and agency are  
18 brought together with space, space which is everywhere and  
19 nowhere, within and outwith the subject.  
20  
21

22  
23 If we return to the proposition with which we began, that the  
24 invisibility of space and the psyche are necessary conditions for  
25 reflecting upon ourselves and our objects, we can see how a  
26 psychotic approach might resist regimes of pervasive surveillance  
27 and control. These regimes use an excessive visibility to  
28 threaten our sense of intimacy. Typically, they are figured in  
29 architecture by the Panopticon. They go to the heart of  
30 subjectivity because they are about positioning and visibility,  
31 and the consequent reformation of the intimate inside. If you  
32 fashion yourself as a psychotic, no one will want to watch you.  
33 Its not that you are too weird and smelly, its that your  
34 signifiers are bad. *Cries shouts, vibrations*. They may look like  
35 signifiers but they don't seem to be yours or mine or anyone's.  
36 This approach is the last stand of the psyche against an  
37 unremitting materialism. We exteriorise the signifier because we  
38 have lost control of ourselves and the material world.  
39  
40

41 Faced with the threat of an aggressive visibility, we can either  
42 guard our intimacy by retreating into more invisibility, which is  
43 like hiding, we would eventually be found; or we can become more  
44 visible, we can forsake our intimacy by refusing the perspective  
45 conception of space that sponsors it. My intimacy to myself is  
46 the flip side of my visibility to others. We either conceal our  
47 desire by diverting the flow of signifiers (neurosis) or we  
48 construct it in the world (psychosis). The psychotic puts his  
49 desire out there in the world in a way that is absolutely real  
50 for him, but means nothing to others. We would experience our own  
51 visibility directly, but conversely, our visibility to others  
52 would signify nothing. It would mark the end of vision, not  
53 because, in some anatomical sense all our oppressors became  
54 blind, but because seeing others would be drained of its  
55 significance. If I am no longer seen by others to be a single  
56 point of agency and desire (hence a potential criminal), there  
57  
58  
59  
60

would be no reason to survey me. The surveyor will see my image, but no longer regards it as a me.

We can see just what an absolutely grotesque betrayal of subjectivity is involved in aggressive and pervasive regimes of surveillance. I am firstly invisible to myself (always behind my view never in it), but visible to others. In Taylor's diagram, the subject is an invisible point of projection for itself and an image on a screen for others. My visibility, this essential aspect of my subjectivity, is in the hands of others. It is a precious agreement between each of us and others. It is not for nothing that space is the field of the other. Architecture is shared not because it is jointly owned but because it is spatial. We noted early that perspective allows us to share spatial experience. We now see that the inter-subjective aspect of perspective extends to our visibility. A panoptic regime is foisted upon us by government and corporations in the name of security. These aims are always poorly defined but well-supported by statistics. We acquiesce. We have no choice because although this regime is of our own making, it is bigger than us. What has been missed in this approach is that if there is a greater good, it is not security. It is to support – not abuse – the conditions that allow subjectivity to happen. In the face of this betrayal, all we can do is respond by finding new forms of subjectivity and visibility that do not go through other subjects.<sup>18</sup>

#### [Caption 12]

The machine aesthetic notwithstanding, I have no examples of the psychotic's gambit in architecture. It is probably here but hiding. It would be the antithesis of the joined up urbanism we celebrate. It would be associated with an excessive individualism that – like Schreber – knows of no others. It would involve a knowing deterioration of the built environment coupled with a technical mastery in the erection of a shiny brave new one (symbolic disintegration, new reality). In either case, we would expect something whose significance was difficult to master. Something not recognised by architecture and its regulatory

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<sup>18</sup> Lacan related perspective to desire in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis (Seminar XI)*, but does not to my knowledge relate it to his earlier work on psychosis. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts...* (Norton Press; New York, 1981), the section 'Of The Gaze As *objet petit a*', pp67ff. I discuss this section in my *Brunelleschi Lacan Le Corbusier* (Routledge 2010), the chapters 'Intercession: a repetition on the gaze and voice of Brunelleschi' pp131ff and 'Desire, position, opacity and death in the visual field' pp149ff. Wajcman and Jonckheere develop the concept of intimacy in their debate in the online journal *S*. See: Gérard Wajcman, 'Intimate Extorted, Intimate Exposed', *S – Journal of the Jan van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, no. 1, 2008. And: Lieven Jonckheere, 'Response: The Politics of "Atopia of the Intimate" in Contemporary Art: the view from Lacanian Psychoanalysis', *S – Journal of the Jan van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, no. 1, 2008.



regimes (RIBA, ARB, Bldg Regs, Highways Act, Town & Country Planning, Planning Advice Notes,...). The nearest I get is literature. With a technical mastery that is almost dizzying, Beckett has a way of distributing *I* across the surface of his text. It is a subterfuge. He knows that if he does that, the people who get pleasure out of surveillance will not read him.<sup>19</sup>

### **...man the artefact**

Psychosis is a radical rethink of man the artefact. We can ask, how do we go on working on ourselves. How can we remake ourselves as machines, or how do we humanise these machines we are becoming. I refer not only to surveillance technology, but to increasingly pervasive medical technologies, the increasing modification (= modification + medication) of the mind, artificial intelligence, artificial language, artificial life, IT, IT networks, networks that resemble neural networks, prosthesis; all the things that augment human beings in material ways and by increments redefine both the *human* bit and the *being* bit. To the threatened individual, the *me* under siege, these initiatives always appear to come from Science or Big Pharma, in other words, from a Corporate Other. There are various ways to resist the this Other, to challenge it, to tarry with it. The psychotic approach would be to cease to be a signifier for it.

The psychotic is able to make great leaps precisely because s/he is unable to use the conceptual frameworks that bind most of us to our desire and that determine our forms of thought. Psychosis has the potential to become a critical category with which to negotiate the complex of humanity (the intimate self) and institutions (Corporate Other) with their architectures and their increasingly pervasive technologies. I am thinking of landscape and landscape-like mega-machine projects which become total environments that elide the usual distinctions between self and other, interior and exterior, figure and ground in favour of continuity, porosity, event....

We need to speculate about the possibility of an ineffable desire in architecture, or  
A desire beyond the symbol or  
A desire stripped of its neuroses or  
A desire fully realized, realized with no displacement, no deferring or temporizing...

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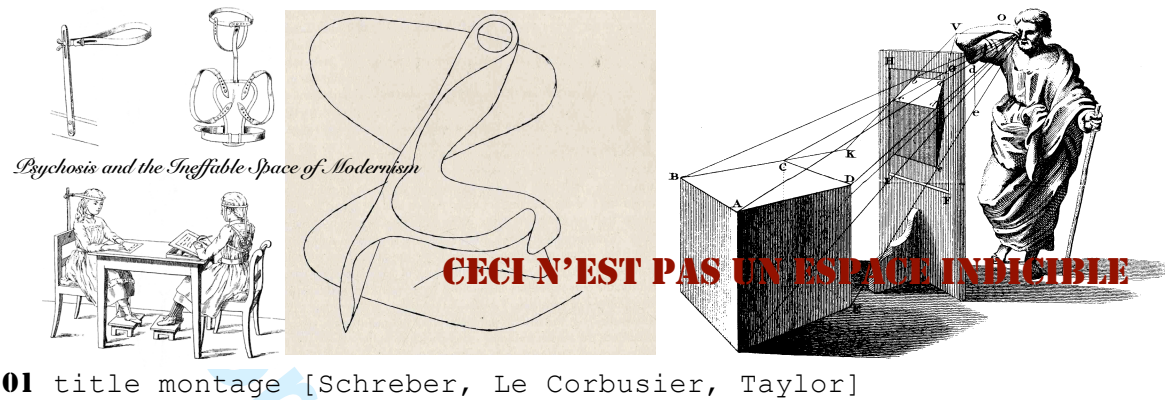
<sup>19</sup> Beckett pushes the limits of subjectivity to breaking point. Witness for instance, *Not I* (1973), two stills of which are shown in this paper. Or the opening lines of *Texts for Nothing IV* (1951/1966), 'Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice, who says this, saying its me?' Or the opening lines of *The Unnamable* (1952/1959), 'Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I'.

and although for the most part we go on **not** acknowledging it, trying in other words, to domestify and gentilify snapshots like Le Corbusier's vision of ineffable space, it is perhaps the affinity between this desire in psychosis and 20<sup>th</sup> Century culture generally, that explains the overwhelming impact and reception of Le Corbusier's work in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

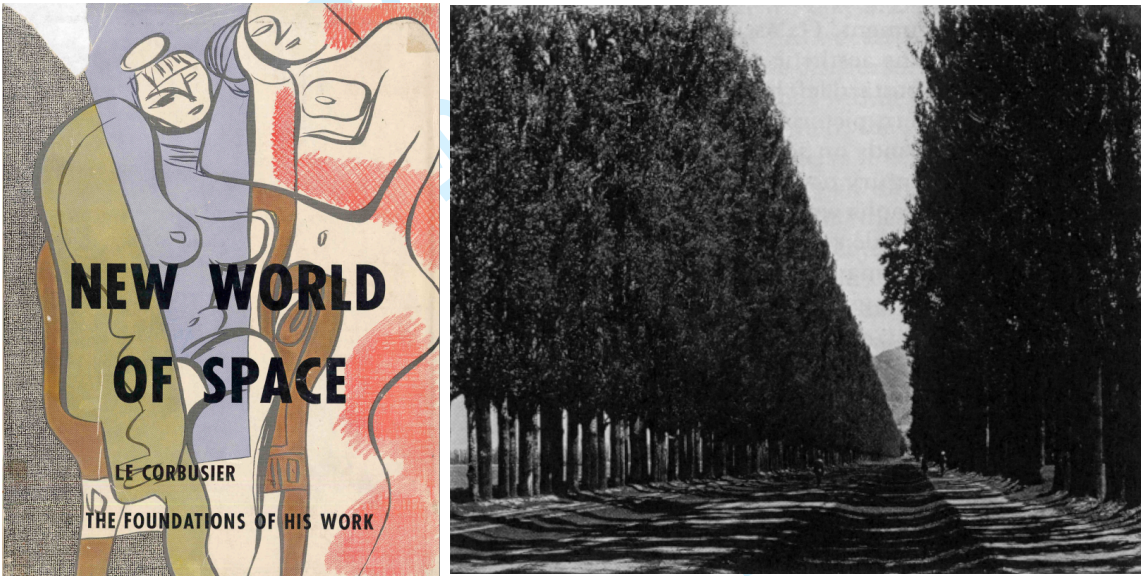
**[Caption 13]**

**Friday 24 February 2012**

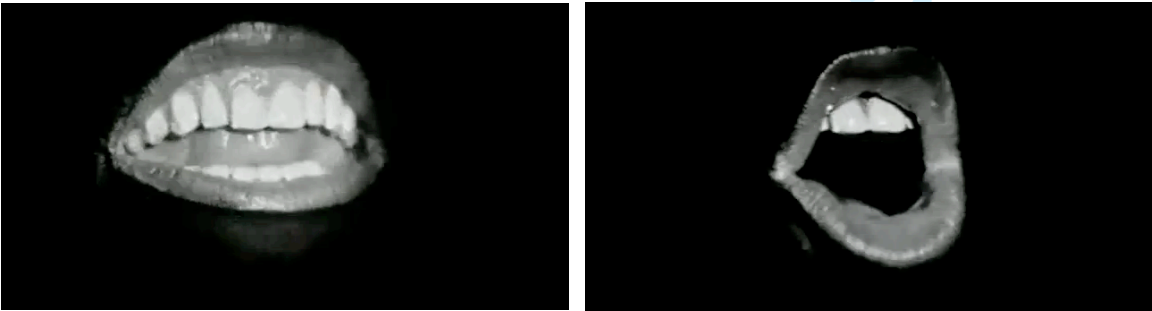
CAPTIONS + IMAGES



01 title montage [Schreber, Le Corbusier, Taylor]

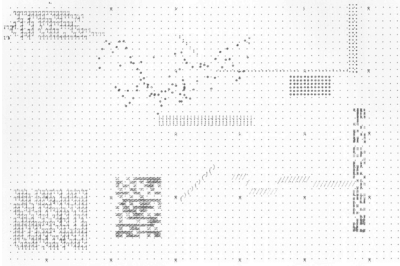


02 cover to Le Corbusier, *New World of Space* (1948) -vs- *Coulisse* [Samuel Bourne]

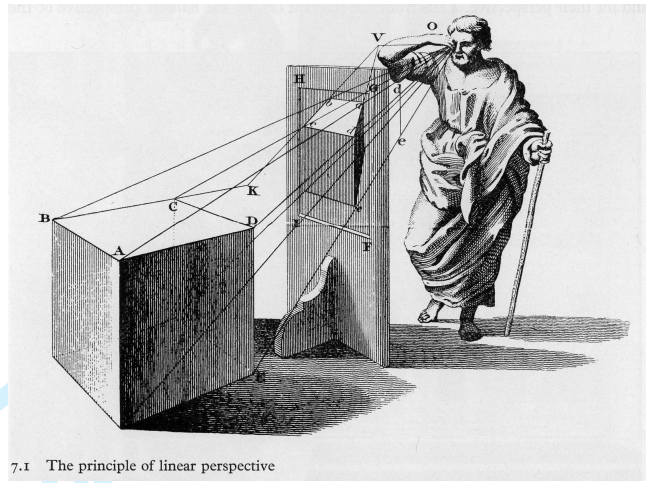


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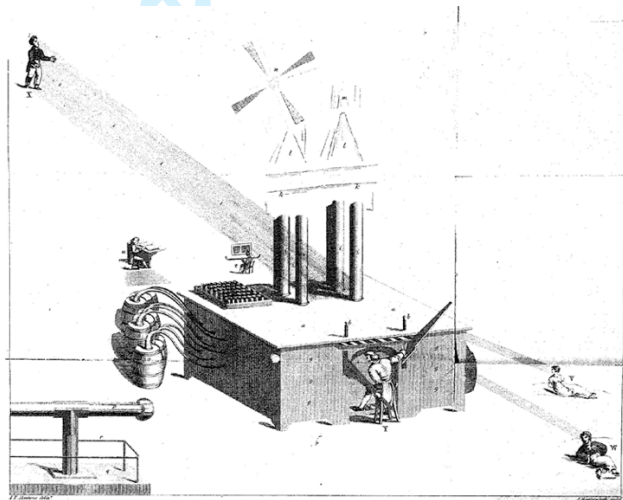


**04** field space [Archizoom] + a dream of shadows [Spelterini, aerial Cheops (1904)] + surface of space [Sugimoto]

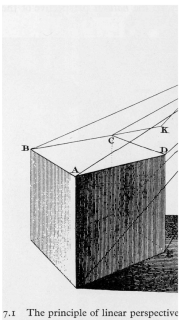
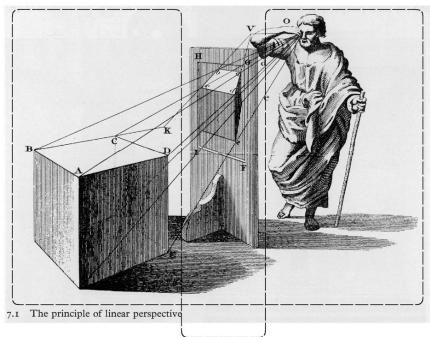
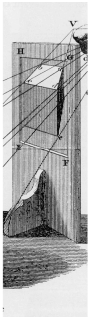


7.1 The principle of linear perspective

**05** view space [Brunelleschi's nave of San Lorenzo] + [Brook Taylor, *New Principles of Perspective* (1811)]



**06** arrows darting away like ecstasy [Bernini] + divine rays and ecstasy,... they make wonderful machines [James Tilly Matthews' 'The Air Loom', illustrated in John Haslam, *Illustrations of Madness* (1810), a book documenting the schizophrenia of Matthews (1770-1814)]



07 remove the tablet in two steps

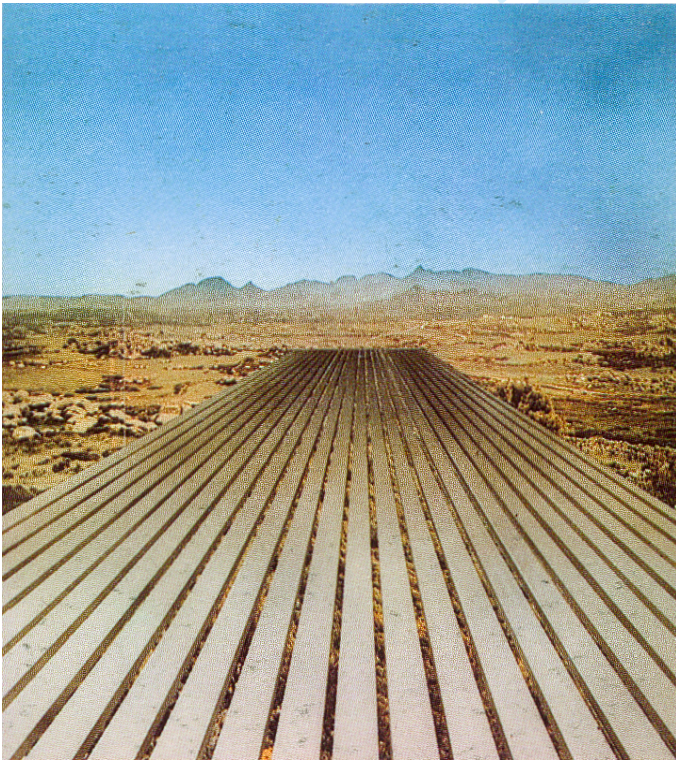


08 images in the existential breeze [Jeff Wall, 'A sudden gust of wind (after Hokusai)' (1993)]





**09** the thing becomes surface [Man Ray] + the word becomes concrete  
[Brassai]

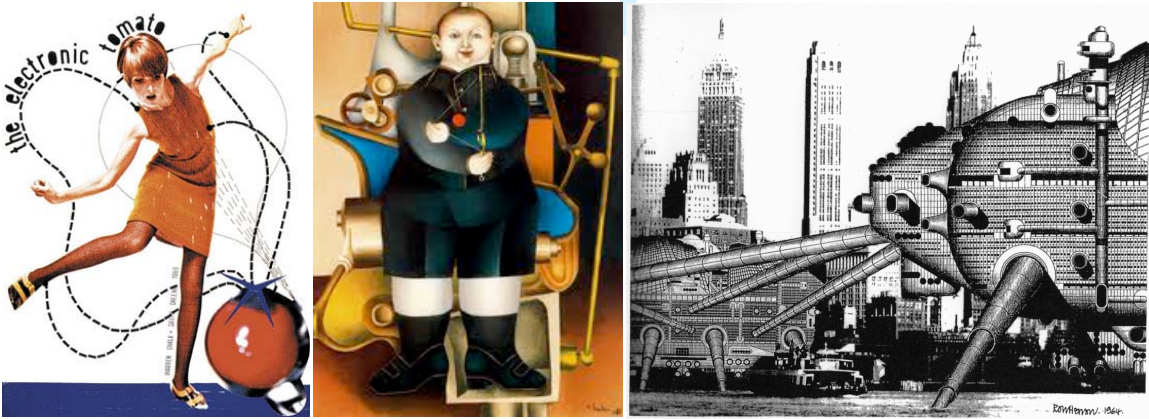


**10** all that is symbol becomes real [Superstudio] all that is air  
becomes solid

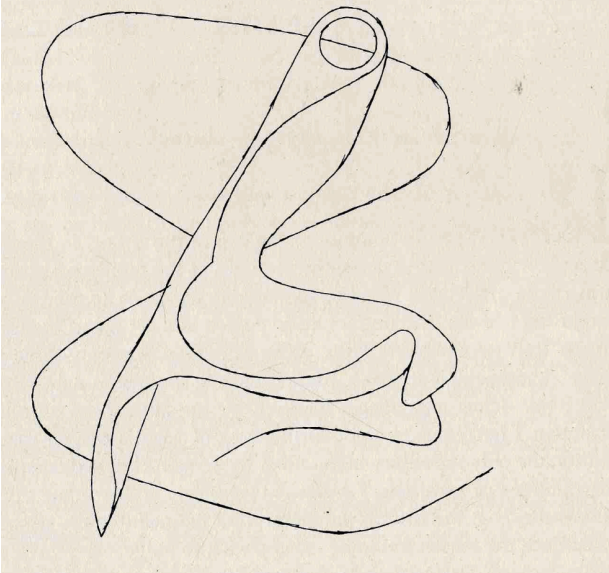




**11** Brunelleschi + the young Jeanneret [Holm, Brunelleschi Lacan Le Corbusier]



**12** machinic bodies and machinic environments: [Richard Lindner (1954) 'Boy with machine' (the machinic body, frontispeice to Deleuze+Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*); Archigram, 'Electric Tomato' (the networked body); Archigram, 'Walking City' (the machinic environment)] In these images, agency and desire have been oddly displaced, either to an outside or to an inside that is really an outside. What should be symbolic has been made real.



**13** the image Le Corbusier published of ineffable space, which is, of course, anything but.... A linear space that wraps itself into an object.